Various aspects of the transition from dictatorship to democracy do not receive sufficient attention in this book. Any transition of this kind involves several tasks: dismantling the institutional apparatus of the Old Regime; reaching basic agreements among major political forces about the characteristics of the new institutions; and putting these institutions in place, including the promulgation of new laws. No less important is the need to legitimate new democratic institutions, by, among other things, demonstrating the efficacy of civilian rule as far as economic and social policies are concerned.

In this context, coming to terms with the legacy of the authoritarian past is crucial. This means much more than changing the laws and re-writing history textbooks. The issue of whether the human rights violations should be investigated and subject to judicial consideration became an integral part of the transitional political agenda. In the Brazilian case, the emergence of a “new left”, a nonviolent legal political force, was a crucial factor in assuring a successful transition. But the logic of various measures taken in the 1980s does not hold today. We are in a different historical moment now. In the Argentine case, the members of the three juntas that ruled the country from March 1976 until 1983 were put on trial. Hundreds of military and police officers were also brought to justice in 1985 and 1986. True, the laws of Punto Final and Obediencia Debida put these trials on hold but they were resumed under the Kirshner governments. In Brazil it is indeed time to revise the 1979 Amnesty Law so that perpetrators can be prosecuted.

Raanan Rein

Tel Aviv University


The field of oral history originated at Columbia University with the idea of recording human memories as historical sources. Oral documents were valued for their reliability, and they served as complementary tools for the study of history, especially where written documents were missing. During recent decades, however, oral history became a research field that stands by itself. Focusing on oral histories as narratives, it developed new theories for interpreting the past through the perspective of the present or the relation between historical truth and manipulations of memory.
Oral history refers to interviewees not only as witnesses or protagonists who produce the primary sources for the historian, but also as collaborators in the writing of history who expand the spectrum through which it is reconstructed by offering insights from different perspectives. In addition, oral history has become a political weapon for institutions or movements that collect testimonies of victims of repression and human rights violations, or of groups who are regarded as invisible by official entities or by the mainstream.

Oral history theories found particular response in Latin America. At the last conference of the International Oral History Association (Barcelona 2014), of the 453 participants 32 per cent came from Latin America and 24 per cent from English-speaking countries. The academic achievements of Latin American oral historians is reflected in *Caminos de historia y memoria en América Latina*.

In the opening article, Gerardo Necoechea Gracia raises the question of whether there is a Latin American oral history. He points out the historical peculiarities of the continent that include the genocide of Indo-Americans and violence of class, race and gender. He refers to a comparative study on the militancy of the left that shows similarities between repressive systems and an ethos of opposition, despite the different context in each country. While the objective of the volume is to open an academic dialogue, “the utopian intention is to transform the world” (p. 3).

Antonio Torres Montenegro refers to a network of Latin American oral historians from different disciplines who share in the struggle against the denial of memory. He argues that a new reading of the past is needed in order to break the discourse of domination, discrimination and lack of equality that exists in the present. His interviews with priests who were sent to Latin America from Europe reflect the “religious imperialism” of the Catholic Church, and also reveal the individual experiences of those priests who turned against its official policy.

Another comparative study is presented by Patricia Pensado Leglise, who interviewed women from four countries who were militant in the left under dictatorial regimes. Despite the different contexts she found similarities in personal motivation, readiness for sacrifice and processes of political radicalization.

Most articles deal with political militants of the left in one country. Igor Goicovic Donoso interviewed a fellow prisoner who described his life as a militant of the Chilean MIR (*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*), analyzing the consolidation and transformation of his revolutionary identity. Rubén Isidoro Kotler analyzes the memories of political repression in Tucuman under the military dictatorship. He writes from the perspective of present day struggles against the rising right. He emphasizes the active role of memory in Argentina as a guarantee of *nunca más*. Pablo Pozzi analyzes political cánticos in Argentina, showing the
construction of the “us” against the “other” among workers and popular classes
and the relations between soccer and politics under the dictatorship.

Politics also plays a role in projects that record the collective memories of
neighbors. Liliana Barela shows the different borders of the Buenos Aires ba-
rrios recorded in official records and narrated in collective memories. Middle
class inhabitants tend to idealize their barrio’s past but exclude the newcomers,
residents of the villas miserias, who create their own idealized past that was
destroyed by military dictatorship. Oral histories serve to legitimize their right
to their territorial and symbolic space. A similar case is presented by Deyanira
del Pilar Daza Pérez, Fabián Becerra González, Fabio Castro Bueno and Jenny
Paola Ortiz Fonseca on the Barrio Nuevo Chile in Bogota, that was founded
under the auspices of the communist party. Inhabitants are divided between
the legal residents, who purchased their houses, and the invaders who suffered
repression, struggled to legitimize their status and expressed through interviews
their historical rights.

A few articles deal with syndicate leaders, labor movements and workers’
repression: Mario Camarena Ocampo analyzes the case of “clientelist culture”
in which the defense of a Mexican workers’ leader is obtained through personal
loyalties. Marcela Camargo Ríos reconstructs the life story of a syndicate leader
in Panama, pointing out the role played by the interviewer in the creation of the
narrative. Mariana Mastrángelo turns to the memories of peasants and workers
in provincial towns in Argentina who joined the communist party, analyzing
the different factors that consolidated their identity and pushed them to political
activism. Gerardo Necoechea Gracia analyzes the oral histories of a mythological
strike during the late Porfiriato in Mexico as a contextualization of memory in
time and space, emphasizing the relations between remembrance and history and
their impact on the conflicts of the present workers. Regina Beatriz Guimarães
Neto tells the story of poor indigenous workers in the Brazilian Amazonia who
experienced persecutions and terror, but responded with violence, and succeeded in
legitimizing their rights to possess land in the new towns that were built for them.

Other groups of subalterns are homosexuals in small towns in southern Brazil,
interviewed by Robson Laverdi. Gender problems are presented in the study
of Marcos Montysuma on women in northern Brazil who took an active part
in the struggle of rubber collectors against large land owners, and continue to
defend ecological values. Joana Maria Pedro analyzes the development of the
feminist movement and its struggle against the military dictatorship in Brazil,
where individual pain and the quest for personal autonomy was transformed
into collective political activism against injustice. Jilma Romero Arrechavala
presents the experience of four women in the Sandinista National Liberation
Front in Nicaragua, the consolidation of their political conscience, their ideals and their aspirations.

Alberto Del Castillo Troncoso discusses the relationship between historical truth and subjective narrative. He recorded the memories of press photographers during the students’ movement in Mexico, and the tactics they used to circumvent government censorship during the massacre in Plaza Tlatelolco. Another Mexican, Graciela de Garay, deals with the importance of historical contextualization as a clue to biographies. She analyzes the life of a famous architect as a reflection of economic and social transition to modernization and democracy.

In the closing article, Cristina Viano analyzes the interaction between recent history and memory, as well as between academia and the social and political world. Since the 1980s Argentina has experienced three phases: demonization, national appeasement and an explosion of remembrance. She concludes that oral history is an essential tool for the study of recent history and also plays an important role in reconciling social conflicts.

Although not all the articles are on the same level, this volume offers a positive answer to the question of whether Latin American oral history exists. It presents the political left as a common denominator and a basis for comparative studies, and offers the reader a rich insight into the personal experiences of protagonists.

Margalit Bejarano


When Emma Cervone first arrived in Ecuador in January 1991, the soil she stepped on had just finished trembling. A historical indigenous uprising, or levantamiento, had swept the country the summer before, impelling the state to heed indigenous political actors and recognize their right to self-determination as ethnically and culturally diverse citizens. If this event marked a watershed in Ecuadorian politics, it similarly heralded a turning point in Cervone’s professional and personal trajectory: she would devote the next two decades of her life – as a researcher, university professor, or consultant for local NGOs – to studying indigenous politics in Ecuador. As her latest publication makes clear, this multifaceted experience lends a helping hand to her academic ambitions. With Long Live Atahualpa, Cervone proves that she possesses the rare flair of an